

## **FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** June 7, 2017

**Agenda Item:** Beckman Wildlife Management Area Grazing Lease (R4)

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 Min

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### **Background**

FWP proposes to renew a cooperative grazing lease on 4,921 acres of the Beckman Wildlife Management Area and adjoining 2,695 acres of the Roe Ranch, northeast of Denton. This lease agreement would continue the use of prescriptive livestock grazing as a habitat management tool on the WMA while positively influencing privately-managed wildlife habitat.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

FWP released a draft environmental assessment for public review on April 14, 2017 and accepted public comment until May 12, 2017. Notice of the proposal and availability of the draft EA was published in the *Lewistown News Argus* and *Great Falls Tribune*. Copies of the draft EA were distributed to neighboring landowners and interested individuals, groups, and agencies to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project. The EA was also available for public review on FWP's website. FWP received one comment that did not directly address this Lease renewal. The single comment we received for the grazing lease was directed at something else related to a DNRC lease, not related to the grazing lease.

### **Alternatives and Analysis:**

Under the no action alternative, the grazing lease would not be extended and no livestock grazing would occur on the Beckman WMA. The Roe Ranch would change its ranch operations again, which could include returning to season-long grazing and increasing grazing intensity, ultimately deteriorating habitat values for wildlife. The Roe Ranch may also remove free public hunting access on their property. In addition, there would be increased maintenance costs to FWP related to monitoring the boundary fences, as the grazing system infrastructure is currently monitored by the lessee.

Under the proposed alternative, the grazing lease would be extended for an additional six years. Grazing treatments, including seasonal deferment and year-long rest, would continue to be prescribed across all affected properties to facilitate plant root development and maintenance, as well as seedling establishment of desirable plant species. There would be some continued maintenance costs related to monitoring grazing and maintaining cross fencing on the WMA if the grazing lease is renewed. Maintenance would continue to be provided by the lessee. Free public hunting would also continue on the Roe Ranch, better facilitating wildlife management in the area.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends final approval of the Beckman WMA-Roe Ranch cooperative grazing lease renewal. The renewal reflects a continuation of past practices.

### **Proposed Motion:**

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve renewal of the Beckman Wildlife Management Area-Roe Ranch cooperative grazing lease for the years 2018 through 2023.